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# The Time it Takes to Listen<sup>1</sup>

## The trill's potential for closure



Ex. 1: Lully, “Enfin il est en ma puissance,” from *Armide* (Ballard’s 1686 edition),  
mm. 1–3.

Who would have thought that such an innocent little phrase could provoke such controversy? Nonetheless, at one point during the famous *Querelle des bouffons*, Rameau rebukes Rousseau for self-contradiction in his analysis of this very passage. Rousseau had lamented Lully’s supposed inattention to the sense of the text: “Here is a trill, and, what is worse, a perfect close [*repos absolu*] on the first verse, when the sense is completed only in the second” (1998, 169). Rameau’s rejoinder is that, in confusing Lully’s merely ornamental trill on “puissance” (indicated by the lower-case “t” below) with the harmonic closure of a perfect cadence, Rousseau overlooks his own detailed definition of cadence (on which more later). First, though, the debate between Rameau and Rousseau over this inconspicuous little trill may be juxtaposed with the altogether more dazzling effect at the end of Beethoven’s last piano sonata.

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere thanks go to Brian Hyer and Jairo Moreno for their incredibly detailed and insightful suggestions, as well as to the anonymous readers for their helpful comments.

160 *tr* *sf* *pp*

162 *(tr)*

164 *(tr)* *tr*

166 *(tr)*

168 *(tr)* *tr*

170 *(tr)* *tr*

Ex. 2: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 162–73.

Each of these examples in its own way foregrounds the intimate relation between the trill and musical closure paradoxically by pulling the two apart so as to expose what joins them. In a typical common-practice scenario, the ornamental trill coincides with the dominant function of the cadential progression, announcing, as it were, the imminent achievement of harmonic closure. A listener would give scant attention to a trill in this context for it is so seamlessly integrated within a stylistically normative display of closure. In these examples, however, the trills acquire a certain autonomy insofar as they are detached (albeit in two different ways) from the performance of harmonic closure. Beethoven's trills are strictly postcadential; yet there is a strong impression that this seemingly infinite fluttering stretches out the ending, almost suspending time. If the trills create a sense of ending, they do so by severing any link with harmonic function: Beethoven seems to take an interest in the trill less for its conventional role in decorating a cadence than in its striking timbral quality, celebrating its brilliance as the pure resonance of sound liberated from any hint of instrumentality.<sup>2</sup> Compare the Lully which, on Rameau's reading at least, seduces Rousseau into hearing harmonic closure where there is none. In both cases the trills appear to signal the potential for closure without effective harmonic closure taking place in actuality.

This suggests that closure does not merely subsist as a facet of music's actual sounding but is, moreover, a symptom of a supplementary activity we call listening. Listening brings music to an end by forming an analytical representation of closure. Thinking in this way discloses how musical closure is distributed between the dimensions of music's sounding, its analytical representation, and the listening activity

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<sup>2</sup> Transformed trills abound across the late quartets and sonatas. The *Grosse Fuge* Op. 133 is another striking example of the eclipse of function by pure sonic materiality.

which joins one to the other. This spacing out of closure, differing from, rather than coinciding with, itself, invites a deconstructive account of listening. The dispute between Rameau and Rousseau could be approached from within the eighteenth-century episteme with its struggle to resolve the tension between reason and sensation, but it is actually in much more recent European thought, specifically in Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of sound-as-resonance (2007), that one finds a way of dissolving this aporia through a deconstruction of both its terms. Alternatively, the disconnection of the trill-as-potential-closure from its actual cadential fulfillment could be analyzed in terms of Leonard Meyer's expectation (1956, 25–37) or Christopher Hasty's projection (1997, 84–5). These models rest upon a conception of potentiality always bound to its necessary, if (infinitely) deferred, realization. Unlike an expectation-based theory, which moves from a possibility invoked in sound to its realization in analytical representation, the deconstructive listening suggested by the *Arietta* variations interposes itself between music's sounding and its analytical representation, but at no point coincides with either.

These examples, moreover, raise the question of the temporality of closure and of listening. A deconstructive account of listening hinges on a deconstructive temporality in which time cannot be grasped in a self-identical present, but only in the process of its construction (by which point it already differs from itself). In imitation of Beethoven's paratactic variation set, a series of scenes unfold over the course of the following pages. Departing from the Rameau-Rousseau debate, I work through various contemporary speculative-theoretical arguments about listening and temporality before returning to the *Arietta's* trills in order set out a theory of listening as a disjointed temporality which supplements that of music's sounding: what I dub “the time it takes to listen.”

## The banned cadence

What troubles the author of the *Observations* most is Rousseau's apparent self-contradiction.<sup>3</sup> In the *Encyclopédie* Rousseau had defined the cadence as "the termination of a harmonic phrase, either on a stop [*repos*], or a perfect chord" (1998, 208). More generally the "act of cadence" names "every passage from a dissonant chord to any other whatsoever, for a dissonant chord can never be left except by a cadence." Echoing Rameau's own notion of music as a succession [*enchaînement*] of cadences (1991, 224), Rousseau goes on to note that, insofar as "every harmonic phrase is necessarily connected by dissonances, whether expressed [*exprimées*] or implied [*sous-entendues*]...all harmony is properly nothing but a succession of cadences." Rousseau then gives a more technically precise definition of the cadence as a relation between closure and its suspension:

What is called an act of cadence always results from two fundamental sounds, of which one announces the cadence and the other terminates it...there is no cadence without dissonance expressed [*exprimée*] or implied [*sous-entendue*]; for, in order to make the close [*repos*] felt, it must be preceded by something that suspends it.

To Rousseau's complaint about the trill in the *Lettre sur la musique françoise* Rameau counters: "can a close of this nature, I say, be taxed with that name [*repos absolu*]?" (1998, 185).<sup>4</sup> Rameau rejects Rousseau's analysis as over-hasty, finding "no

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<sup>3</sup> Rameau seeks to "render to Lully the justice owed to him, and of which he would have been robbed through a Criticism which is all the more ill-founded as it is in general contradictory to the Principles which the Author has himself laid down in the" (1998, 184).

<sup>4</sup> This assumes that *repos absolu* is synonymous with *cadence parfaite*. As Charles Dill (1998, 170) notes, Rameau himself certainly used the term in this way (1750, 36–8]. In a footnote Rameau

shadow" (184) of a *repos absolu* which, by Rousseau's own definition would seem to require a two-chord harmonic progression from dominant to tonic. Here, on the contrary, Rameau notes the continuation of a single tonic harmony throughout the first verse and persisting into the beginning of the second. It is possible that Rousseau understands *repos* as a broader category of closure of which the harmonic cadential progression is but a subset and there is undoubtedly a rhetorical motivation here for the trill and the break in the melodic line.<sup>5</sup>

Whether Rousseau did in fact mishear the passage in question matters less than the fact that the proximity and overlap between various dimensions of closure were sufficient as to allow Rameau to conjure up a listener who confuses rhetorical, ornamental, and harmonic functions. This composition of "Rousseau's ear" hinges upon a possibility for conflation that is captured perfectly by the multiplicity of meaning ascribed to the term "cadence" at this time. The irony surely does not escape Rameau that the very distinction he seeks to uphold between the harmonic-cadential and ornamental functions is made by Rousseau himself in his entries for the *Encyclopédie*, where separate entries are given for the use of the term "*en Musique*" and as a "*terme de*

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(184–5), furthermore, sets out in detail the passages where Rousseau himself uses the word *repos* interchangeably for *cadence* in his *Encyclopédie* entry: for example, "*Dans la Cadence parfaite*" is rephrased by the end of the same sentence as "*pour établir un repos parfait*" (1998, 210).

<sup>5</sup> The trill gives force to the word *puissance* and expresses Armide's sense of triumph, while the break renders the *ce* that follows audibly distinct from the end of the previous word, something that would in any case be necessary in performance.

*chant*.”<sup>6</sup> There Rousseau had noted that the term cadence also refers to the routine practice in French music of deploying the trill at the penultimate harmony of a musical phrase, “whence [the ornament itself] has without doubt, taken the name cadence” (1998, 213). Rousseau’s own note in the *Lettre* shows him far from unaware of the need to introduce a measure of terminological precision into the discourse on a continually evolving and geographically contingent practice of ornamentation. Of the word *trille*, he writes: “I am constrained to frenchify this word in order to express the fluttering of the throat which the Italians give this name because, finding myself at every instant having to make use of the word *cadence* in another sense, it was not otherwise possible for me to avoid continual equivocations” (1998, 169). Rameau’s wholehearted agreement with this choice of word could only be matched by his disappointment that Rousseau should seemingly succumb to the very conflation he seeks to avoid. While ends of phrases were often marked by trills and musical phrases sometimes culminated in the harmonic closure of the *repos absolu*, it by no means followed that every trill heralded *harmonic* closure.

Rameau’s complaint to this extent anticipates that made recently by William Caplin (2004, 59), who observes that “the powerful connection between phrase and cadence” is so intimate that it tends towards their being defined in relation to one another with the risk that “a phrase ending is sometimes identified as a cadence despite the failure of its concluding harmonic progression to satisfy the fundamental criteria for cadence.” Caplin instead insists on disentangling the concepts of cadence and phrase, restricting the former to its syntactical function as distinguished from rhetorical gestures

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<sup>6</sup> While the second of these two (*terme du chant*), in which cadence is equated with the trill, is unsigned, it seems reasonable to attribute it as well to Rousseau.



of closure.<sup>7</sup> If one were to uphold a similar distinction in reading the *Lettre* between *repos absolu* as a rhetorical “full stop” and a cadence as a harmonic progression, one might not jump to Rameau’s dismissive conclusion. The point, however, is that the propensity for conceptual elisions around the cadence poses the risk of hearing cadences where there are none. Long before the misapprehensions of recent Anglophone theory, there was sufficient conceptual intimacy between rhetorical and harmonic closure for Rameau to exploit the potential conflation of *repos absolu* with cadence as a strategy to discredit Rousseau. In other words, the close association between the two dimensions of closure allows Rameau to pass off a particular composition of Rousseau’s ear: one that mishears rhetorical and ornamental signifiers of closure for the real (read: harmonic) thing.

It is perhaps helpful at this point to set aside an unlikely explanation for Rousseau’s “error”: that he scanned the page visually and, in haste, registered the trill without noting the lack of a change in harmony.<sup>8</sup> Rameau uses the ear/eye opposition to highlight a capacity reserved for listening: *sous-entendre*. With a footnote to Rousseau’s own distinction between *sous-entendu* and *exprimé*, Rameau asks “but are the eyes enough in Music?” (1998, 188). His response is an emphatic no: “more than eyes are needed...in order to judge an Art in which the cause resides as much in *what is implied* [*sous-entendu*] as in what is expressed [*exprimé*]” (193; emphasis mine). While “*sous-entendu*” is often rendered as “implied,” the French is more nuanced than this translation allows. The French *entendre* has the sense of both to understand and to hear. *Sous-entendre*, then, suggests a hearing underneath or, *under-standing*, or even under-

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<sup>7</sup> He reserves the term “theme” for those formal groups closed by the formal functionality of the cadence.

<sup>8</sup> It seems highly unlikely that Rousseau would not have heard *Armide* at the *Opéra*.

understanding: the apprehension of what comes underneath, what supports, this hearing-understanding.

More recently Pierre Schaeffer (1966) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) have grappled directly in their theories of listening with what kind of hearing is meant by *entendre*. While space does not permit a comparison of their phenomenological and deconstructive approaches,<sup>9</sup> it suffices to note that, unlike Schaeffer's distinction between *comprendre* and *entendre*, Nancy argues that the *logos* is very much at stake in *entendre*, instead distinguishing *entendre* from *écouter*:

*Entendre*, "to hear," also means *comprendre*, "to understand," as if "hearing" were above all "hearing say [*entendre dire*]" (rather than hearing sound"), or rather, as if in all "hearing there had to be a "hearing say," regardless of whether the sound perceived was a word or not. But even that might be reversible: in all saying...there is hearing, and in hearing itself, at the very bottom of it, a listening [*une écoute*]. Which means: perhaps it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense [*faire sens*] (or to be *logos*), but that it want also to resound. (6)

Nancy positions his theory of listening against a history of philosophy which therefore "always hears [*entend toujours*] but cannot listen [*ne peut écouter*]" (1).<sup>10</sup> And yet Nancy's deconstruction is supple enough to avoid opposing hearing and listening completely. He distinguishes them only so as to demonstrate that listening is an intensification of hearing (5) and that there is a listening within hearing itself. A strong reading of Rousseau might then construe *sous-entendre* as hearing what *underpins* understanding,

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<sup>9</sup> See Kane 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Philosophy has "superimposed upon...or else substituted for listening [*l'écoute*] something that might be more on the order of *understanding* [*l'entente*]" (1).

as hearing the very listening that is at the bottom of *entendre*, but this is to get ahead of ourselves. For now, let us observe that, for Nancy, listening lies underneath—"at the very bottom of"—hearing-understanding because what it listens to (*sens*) is what makes hearing-understanding possible. This is because listening and sense share the same structure of a resonant referral that spaces itself out as it returns to itself. *Sens* is neither making sense nor aesthesis alone: it is that which, in sensing, also makes sense. It is the remainder left over when sense is divided from sensation such that listening and sense deconstruct the closed system of signification with its metaphysics of self-identical presence. Only because there is no fixed identity between signifier and signified and no self-identical subject, but a fundamental spacing out and exposure to the other, is something like communication and understanding even possible. Listening-as-resonance is the condition of possibility of hearing-understanding.

With this in mind, it is possible to deepen the analysis of Rameau's term. In the table of terms in the *Traité* he uses *sous-entendre* in a specific and fairly literal sense to describe the positing of the fundamental bass:

By the word *sous-entendre* one must be made aware that the sounds to which it is applied can be heard in chords in which they are not in fact present...it is necessary to imagine that [the fundamental sound] must be heard below [*dessous*] the other sounds, when one says that it is *sous-entendu*." (1971, xxi trans. modified)

What Rameau means exactly by *sous-entendre* and the closely related but carefully differentiated *supposer* has vexed historians of theory, but a number of commentators observe that this concept has the effect of opening up music's sounding in the direction of listening and analysis.<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is a quasi-deconstructive gesture here,

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of Rameau's changing conceptions of *supposer* see Martin 2012.

which Brian Hyer (1994) brings out when he translates the other term Rameau uses to describe these unsounded, but heard dissonances, *ajoutées*, as “supplemental.”<sup>12</sup> To describe the dissonances as supplementary is to hear the mark of an emptiness in the *ajouté* and thus to deconstruct the self-presence of the triad, showing that it is always-already opening onto dissonance-as-other. Because the dissonances are neither notated nor sounded, but heard, this suggests that the sonorous is always-already marked by the trace of listening.

Allan Keiler (1981, 93) has persuasively argued that the fundamental bass functions as an analytical paraphrase which, insofar as this “hearing” takes the form of music, has a metalinguistic character: music about music. What is important here is the gap which this “about” registers between the sonorous and its analytical representation. I am suggesting that it is precisely the activity of listening which spaces the sonorous from its representation and thereby makes possible an analytical “hearing” that does not simply coincide with sound. Moreover, this listening is itself composed of the same structure as the sonorous: Nancy speculates that “listening itself [is] sonorous” (5). The object of *sous-entendre*, then, does not lie completely outside the sphere of the sonorous, but is the condition of possibility of hearing that almost always goes unheard, the listening that goes unheard in all hearing. Because, for Nancy, listening shares with its object the same structure of resonance there arises the possibility of a listening that listens to itself, turning back upon its own condition for audibility.

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<sup>12</sup> This calls to mind Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues* where he notes the double connotation that *suppléer* has in French: “Le supplément s’ajoute...Mais le supplément supplée. Il ne s’ajoute que pour remplacer” (1997, 144–5).

Hearing the fundamental bass can be argued to be logically *necessary* (*il faut s'imaginer qu'il devrait être*) in a way that hearing a completely unsounded cadence is not. Rousseau's "misheard" cadence instead calls for a capacity for hearing that realizes not merely what must be heard, but may or may not be heard. One might usefully adapt Oswald Ducrot's distinction between *le sous-entendu* and *le présupposé* (1987, 33–46) which separates an inference discoverable only in the contingent taking-place of enunciation and listening (which therefore may or may not be discerned) from one that is *necessarily* deducible from the words spoken themselves. In the Lully example, there is no dominant to herald tonic resolution as a possibility waiting to be actualized, so the harmonic closure appears alongside the actual sound of the tonic as a mere alternative possibility (that the trill *might* have been supported by dominant harmony). Moreover, in the absence of a dominant it is the trill itself which points to this dimension of aurality, to the apprehension of the cadence as a potentiality which may or may not happen. Rameau asks, "Does the *Trill* have this character [of a *repos absolu*] in itself when, on the contrary, it is generally employed only to *announce* the close?" (1998, 185). So intimate is the connection between trill and cadence that the trill leads the ear to conjure up the progression it announces—even if it does not take place. The part of the listening experience that attends to actual sounds typically threatens to drown out this dimension of the unsounded audible: that which does not sound and, as such, is not actually heard, but which, insofar as it is a potentiality for hearing, may be listened for. But the world of other possibilities and paths not taken, fleetingly conjured up as the other of actuality, is a very rich and important part of musical listening. Rameau's account of Rousseau's "error" is instructive because it flags up how this dimension of listening is present even, or perhaps especially, in music's smallest building blocks.

How does this relate to the well-recognized capacity of music at the turn of the nineteenth century to elicit sharply-defined expectations in the listener because its conventions are predictable? In a reversal of the Meyerian logic according to which style precedes the listening-effect it causes, I suggest that this musical style always-already anticipates the activity of listening in its technical workings, formal or otherwise. Consider this shift from the perspective of the cadential trill. From the standpoint of Meyerian expectation, it makes sense that (albeit earlier in the century) a trill, whose conventional deployment in cadential progressions lends it a signifying power (it “announces” the cadence), might trigger an expectation that this reference will be made good (that the trill will turn out to be part of a cadential progression). Within this structure of expectation, the ear supplies the yet-to-be completed cadence. *Le sous-entendu* goes beyond this structure of anticipation in which the hypothetical cadence evaporates once the sounding music thwarts the expectation, emerging only with the kind of listening that attends to the category of the “what-might-have-been.” Rousseau hears the potential, but unsounded cadence. Listening is inscribed within the cadential trill in the guise of a hearing-what-might-be.

These trills, whose reference to an actual sounding cadence suspended, produce instead what I call a *banned cadence*. I use the term “banned” in two senses. First, it reflects Rameau’s prohibition on using such a term to refer to a break without the necessary harmonic closure. Second, it echoes the appropriation of the notion of the “ban” in recent post-deconstructive thought to describe a similar structure of suspended relation. For Giorgio Agamben the structure of the ban manifests itself in the relation between actual discourse (*parole*) the set of potential utterances that may or may not come to be said (*langue*). A banned cadence, then, is one whose “actual denotation is maintained in infinite suspension” (1998, 20): the trill has a minimal relation to the

unsounded cadence by which it refers to it as merely potential. What appears to be outside language—"banned"—is language's pure potential to signify. Similarly, listening, which initially appears to be outside music's sounding, is included within the sonorous as its pure potential to be heard.

For Agamben, the ban represents a minimal form of relation, in which the two parts remain in some sense bound to one another, even though this bond is maximally attenuated. His strives towards refocusing away from the objects caught in the relation to the *very fact of their relating*. I suggest that a similar exposure of relationality itself takes place when the reference of trill to cadence is suspended: the focus of attention ceases to be the trill or the cadence it announces and instead becomes the habitual listening that supplies the link between them because of the ear's familiarity with convention.<sup>13</sup> The trill refers to the listener who supplies the dimension of the might-be and might-have-been that accompanies every stretch of music and thereby anticipates the act of listening within the fabric of the music. Recognizing the suspended relation of the banned cadence allows one to apprehend beyond the heard not merely the audible but, moreover, the listening itself that usually goes unheard.

### **Hearing listening**

I am not the first to discern the reference to a listening subject within the harmonic progression that anchors the tonal system. In a deconstructive reading of Rameau's

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<sup>13</sup> The cadence is arguably the privileged form in which this exposure of relationality takes place because, more than the style's conventionalized melodic patterning or functional differentiation, its rhythmic-cadential paradigm, with its hierarchical periodicity, produces the capacity to know where one is within the form and to foresee what is yet to come.

music theory, Brian Hyer (1994) outlines a relational tonal system which hinges upon the presence of dissonances that “supplement” the dominant (with an added seventh) and subdominant (with an added sixth) triads in order to set up a referential system of perpetual deferral. These supplementary dissonances make the triads distinguishable from one another and create the drive towards the tonic. Following the Derridean critique of presence, Hyer argues that the tonic is not constituted as a presence in itself, but solely determined by its relation to the dominant and subdominant triads whose supplementary dissonances enable them to signify it; likewise for dominant and subdominant. This lack of self-sufficiency is often conceptualized as a “desire” for resolution, an impression that arises through a kind of prosopopoeia in which our own listening activities project inclinations onto the chords.

For the most part, this listening remains transparent as a presupposed condition of possibility taken for granted by the tonal system.<sup>14</sup> When the trill’s reference to harmonic closure is cut off, however, it suspends the smooth, automatic operation of this mechanism, thereby rendering it momentarily opaque. Just as the dominant, which the trill usually decorates, refers to the tonic, the trill itself refers to the movement from dominant and tonic that transforms two chords into a cadence. In this way, the trill refers to the listening activity that motivates the progression. In the trill’s suspended reference, the sound of the actual cadence, which tends to deflect attention away from its condition of possibility, falls away to expose the pure fact of listening itself.

This becoming-perceptible of a transparent listening subject cannot be thought without reference to the temporality of musical experience, as Jairo Moreno (2004)

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<sup>14</sup> Borrowing Carolyn Abbate’s term (1991), Hyer suggests that these “unsung voices” are “so discreet that we often fail to notice their incessant chattering above the musical din” (41).



recognizes. Situating Rameau's harmonic theory within a larger narrative that sees an increasing implication of the subject in (music-theoretical) representation, Moreno moves on to Gottfried Weber's painstaking analysis of the opening of Mozart's "Dissonance" quartet to examine the multiple representations of time with which it grapples. Likening the listener's doubt to Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutic of suspicion," Moreno describes Weber's analysis as presenting a listening experience "in which each new note is an opportunity for dissension and an occasion for jostling expectations against disappointing contradictions" (129). The interpretative anxiety is so great as to expand what is a 25-second extract in musical performance into a much longer 30-page analytical experience. The significant difference between the two time-spans "introduces a yawning gap (some may consider it an existential abyss) between the experience of music and the cognitive apprehension of that experience through a theory-driven representation" (130). Weber's thick description begins to mobilize a deconstruction of time-consciousness:

"Das Gehör" seeks to slow down the passing of time...but not without giving rise to two temporalities: that of analysis, and that of a musical performance of the introduction. (154)

What interests me is not so much that there is a gap between musical experience and its apprehension but the source of that gap. Moreno argues that Weber's ear is inevitably caught in the aporias that beset any representation of temporality. As Hyer (1996, 94) puts it, "[B]y the time the ear gathers enough information to make a decision about a given moment in the music, the moment is long gone." If listening is the activity of producing a representation of musical experience, listening itself takes time—and (usually) more time than that which passes during the succession of harmonies.

So, there is first musical experience which takes place over a passage of time and then there is the (analytical) representation of that time that takes place in listening. The necessary incompleteness of the representation, together with the insurmountable hiatus between musical experience and listening, occurs precisely because of the irremediable excess of the time it takes to complete the representation. There are thus three times: (1) the time in which the succession of harmonies sounds, (2) the time constructed by the analytical representation of the music (what Moreno terms “post-figuration”), and (3) the time it takes to bring that representation of time to an end, the time it takes to complete the analytical representation of time. This last I call *the time it takes to listen*.

I develop this notion of the time it takes to listen from linguist Gustave Guillaume’s concept of “operational time” in his work on verbal forms (1970). Agamben looks to Guillaume because his theory of the verb provides a way of thinking the temporality of the transition from potential to actual.<sup>15</sup> Guillaume theorizes that verbal systems construct a representation of time (a time-image) with the successive formation of aspect, mood, and tense unfolding the image in three dimensions of time in its potentiality, time in the process of its formation and time as it has been constructed. I see a similar, if not necessarily linear, process of unfolding taking place as listening produces a representation of the time of musical experience, moving between “I might hear,” “I hear” and “I have heard.”

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<sup>15</sup> The Guillaumian concept of *temps impliqué*, to which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer fleetingly in their discussion of musical refrains (1987, 384), is ideally suited to Agamben’s project insofar as it identifies that dimension of the verb which measures an event’s position on the spectrum between potential and actual, and yet Agamben focuses instead on *temps opératif* because he is interested in the way in which Guillaume projects this process of actualization onto the entire process of temporal construction in the verb.

For Agamben, Guillaume's analysis has the advantage that it addresses the seeming aporia whereby "the human mind experiences time, but it does not possess the representation of it [without] recourse to constructions of a spatial order" (2005, 65). The spatial representation of time as a line divided by the present into two segments of past and future "is inadequate precisely because it is too perfect." It results in "something perfectly *representable*, but absolutely *unthinkable*," while reflecting on a real experience of time yields "something *thinkable*, but absolutely *unrepresentable*" (64). The time-image "presents time as though it were always already constructed, but does not show time in the act of being constructed in thought" (65). Similarly, in the context of musical listening, the analytical representation of the time of musical experience does not show the time it takes to listen and to construct that representation. In order that the constructed image include a reference to the operational time in which it was constructed, the three-dimensional structure of verb formation allows the process of formation to be cast back onto the time-image itself. Guillaume thus inscribes into the representation of time the very time it takes to complete that representation by ensuring that the representation not be self-identical.

The time it takes to listen likewise means that listening is not only separated from sounding music but also, more critically, differs from itself, moves outside itself. The deconstruction of listening has many ramifications,<sup>16</sup> but I use the deconstructive gesture

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<sup>16</sup> For example, following Nancy's work on resonance, Peter Szendy (2008) illustrates this movement outside itself by arguing that listening is always a form of reappropriation and musical arrangement, thereby deconstructing the notions of the musical work and its authorship. Nancy uses the notion of sound-as-resonance discussed above as the basis of a deconstructive ontology in which the subject reverberates outside itself without ever returning to coincide with itself. Szendy then takes this to argue that listening always-already

to open up a temporal noncoincidence in listening.<sup>17</sup> Listening is not selfsame insofar as it divides itself between two apprehensions: the apprehension of the time of musical experience through its analytical representation and the possible apprehension of the time it takes to bring that representation to completion, that is, the time it takes to listen. The first is the representation of the time of music's sounding, the second a representation of the time it takes to construct in its entirety that first representation. Listening is that supplement included, but presupposed in any analytical representation by means of which that representation is fully constructed.

Just as the time of analysis corresponds to the representation of the anticipated cadence in the Lully example, so the time it takes to listen corresponds to the supplementary listening that remains presupposed in its transparency. This dimension is not the object of listening (what is heard or what is audible), but the fracture that opens up as listening attempts to grasp itself as that part of aurality which cannot be heard precisely because it is strictly inaudible. If the analytical representation constitutes a "listening" to the music, it takes further time to grasp the potentiality of listening that makes possible the particular actual listening. The time it takes to listen corresponds to

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goes outside itself never coinciding with itself or returns to itself without remainder. He describes the structure of listening as ecstatic starting from the observation that that my listening is only my own to the extent that it is always-already shared.

<sup>17</sup> My deconstructive account departs from the phenomenological tradition on this point. Whereas Husserl (1991), in order to avoid the problem of infinite regress, derives grounds the self-constituting flow of consciousness in the unity of a double intentionality of the temporality of the object and of consciousness itself, Derrida (1973) discerns a spatialization of temporalization in Husserl's account of protention and retention.

this very potentiality of listening which goes unheard in every actual listening.<sup>18</sup> The time it takes to complete the analytical representation is what makes possible that representation, but this time is not included as such in the representation. To apprehend that time it takes to listen would be to expose, not this or that particular listening rendered in an actual analytical representation, but the activity of listening as such.

Up until this point, the discussion has sought to discern the trace of listening on the side of representation. But what if listening were also to cast a shadow back on the time of musical experience? If we are to expose the fracture on the side of representation between image and its construction, should we not also challenge the apparent purity, identity, and immediacy that remains on the side of musical experience? In a signature maneuver that he calls the Apelles' cut, Agamben demonstrates that operational time subsists within both categories of time, revealing that they are nonidentical with themselves.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the time of musical experience and the time of its

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<sup>18</sup> This is similar to how the potentiality to speak goes unsaid in actual discourse.

<sup>19</sup> Guillaume's concept of operational time assists Agamben in addressing debates over messianism by reading St Paul's notion of *kairos* as the interval between chronological time on earth from the time of eternity after Christ's Second Coming (Agamben 2005, 61–71). Agamben proposes that the time of *kairos* does not divide chronological time from eternity, but divides each from itself. Just as there is no perfect representation of time, for Guillaume, because it is always marked by the time it takes to construct, neither secular time nor eternity coincide with themselves exactly but also contain within themselves the remainder left over when one is divided from the other. Chronological time and eternity cannot be divided cleanly from one another because neither is self-identical. This structure of relationality is similar both to the one introduced by Guillaume's operational time between time and its

representation are divided from one another such that neither coincides perfectly with itself. Instead, the two times contract as they meet one another in a zone of indistinction that is the time it takes to bring the representation of time to its end. On Agamben's reading, operational time is not an ulterior time added to chronological time, but an interior time-within-time, a looping-back-within-itself by which time registers its disjunction from itself—an idea that helps to grasp how music represents its closure.

Lully's trill registers a similar disjunction of music from itself. It is not simply that Rousseau's "mistake" is possible because of the gap between musical experience and representation, nor that an overly active or doubtful interpretative activity which produces myriad hypothetical representations can contradict the audible sounds, nor that the habit of the ear supplies a representation of a cadence at odds with the actual experience of the passage. The trill's intimate relation to ending is not merely the result of a conventional usage that ties the ornament to the temporal function of the cadence's harmonic progression. Rather, the trill relates to ending in a different sense. By pointing towards the dimension of hearing itself, it registers the time it takes to achieve the representation of a cadence: the trills refer to the time it takes to bring to its end the representation of time coming to its end.

### **A Milky Way of trills**

If Rousseau's "error" over a single ornament can refer to the minimal apprehension of the temporality of listening, imagine how magnified the connection between trill and time becomes when the ending of the *Arietta* variations, set ablaze by some of the most

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representation and also to the time it takes to listen—I say "similar" because no example coincides absolutely with another.

technically-taxing trills in the piano repertoire, brings Beethoven's monumental sequence of sonatas to an end. Grand endings motivate grand claims: "Beethoven was the greatest master of musical time," states Charles Rosen (1997, 445) by way of introducing Op. 111. He can even freeze time: "the slow movement of the op. 111 succeeds as almost no other work in suspending the passage of time at its climax" (446). Compare Michael Spitzer's observation: "As long as our attention remains fixed on these extra-temporal stars [the trills], which reminded even Schenker of a 'Milky Way of tones,' the Arietta never really ends" (2006, 157). Rosen, however, is not talking about the movement's dazzling conclusion, but the passage beginning at m. 106 which interrupts the sequence of variations, again, though, with the radiance of trills (Example 3). By hearing this passage as an expansion of a cadential trill that implies a quasi-cadenza, Rosen invokes the same idea of the trill as an index of ending discussed earlier.

Rosen's remarks, moreover, imply a connection between ending and the suspension of musical time. His claim for the suspension of time is grounded in a harmonic analysis of the passage immediately following the outbreak of trills. Observing that this is the only substantial departure from C major in the entire movement, he proposes that the effect of suspending the rhythmic motion is to deprive this harmonic motion of its functional force. It is not so much that Beethoven suspends the temporality of harmonic succession from without through the imposition of a rhythmic or textural brake, but that the descending-fifth progression realizes its potential to suspend its own movement when it appears as a diatonic sequence:

The mastery lies in Beethoven's understanding that a sequence does not move, that a diatonic circle of descending fifths within classical tonality does not exist on a plane of real action, so that the long series of tiny harmonic movements that prolong this immense inner expansion serve only as a harmonic pulse. (Rosen 1997, 447)





diatonic scale and thus keep it from modulating—that, if followed long enough, will get you back to where you had started from.” (2008, 10). The overall effect is one of musical stasis, subjecting time to space. Following Richard Taruskin’s argument, however, Berger notes that it was precisely this trajectory that, beginning with Corelli’s instrumental music, would found a sense of linear propulsion in music. This then begs the question of how the sequence is simultaneously capable of freezing time and creating forward momentum.

For the author of the *Traité*, the sequence elevates the principle of the *sous-entendu*—both dissonance and, by extension, listening—into the motivation not only for cadences but for harmonic progression in general. All the chords in the sequence, with the exception of the cadential goal, enjoy a certain sameness by virtue of the fact that none can claim a hierarchical superiority. As Moreno notes, the sequence, cut off from its closing progression, “reduces harmonic content, particularly function, to pure motion” (2004, 118). Without any relation to an origin or end, the motion itself appears static. The absence of hierarchy between scale degrees in Rousseau’s system at this point and the preference for a single local relation between *tonique* and *dominante-tonique* removes the differential on account of which one might perceive movement.

It is precisely this capacity of the sequence to resist confinement within a hierarchical framework of the scale that grants it a certain utility within tonal music: the non-diatonic sequence is able to open out beyond the limits of a single tonal center. It produces this tonal difference, though, by reproducing the *same* dominant-tonic relation at each step. The sequence can thus be said to be a machine for producing larger-scale difference out of local sameness. The local relations between each step of the sequence with a circle of perfect fifths coincide with one another, while the gap between the tonal centers at the beginning and end of the sequence marks a higher-order noncoincidence.

Two different representations of time emerge from this pattern of sameness and difference. Agamben (1993, 77) analyses them by borrowing Lévi-Strauss's distinction between "cold" societies whose dominant concept of time is driven by the tendency of ritual to see the coincidence between events so that they can be grouped into larger structures (individual days united into a series within the calendar), and "hot" societies whose play dissolves the coincidence of structures into a string of disconnected events (living moment-to-moment). If ritual is a mechanism for transforming diachrony into synchrony, play performs the reverse operation. The non-diatonic sequence that refocuses the tonal center through its unfolding functions like play, transforming the local synchronicity (the identity of local steps) into a larger-scale diachrony (creating the impression of the passage of time between beginning and end).

The sequence is the *Arietta*, however, is diatonic and thereby subordinates the possibility of diachrony inherent in the sequence to a higher-order synchrony whereby every return to the tonic coincides. It would be wrong, though, to suggest that the diatonic sequence simply reproduces (larger-scale) synchrony out of (local) synchrony, condensing the same into the same. The diatonic sequence that returns to its original tonic subordinates the fifths progression to a second-order tonic prolongation, but it cannot produce this synchrony without there being a trace of residual diachrony at the level of local relations between steps of the cycle. This stain of first-order difference subsists in the introduction of the diminished fifth into the progression of otherwise perfect fifths. As Agamben notes,

If ritual is...a machine for transforming diachrony into synchrony, play, conversely, is a machine for transforming synchrony into diachrony...with the clarification that in either case this transformation is never complete...because every game...contains a ritual aspect and every rite an aspect of play. (74)

If there is always some residue left over in the production of diachrony and synchrony, it appears in tonality in the guise of the diminished fifth required for a fifths cycle to return to its original tonic. The diminished fifth shows that the tonic is not self-identical, as we might suppose, but can only return to itself and become the “same” by passing through a moment of intervallic difference. It is the trace of the Pythagorean comma that prevents the tonal system from coinciding with itself. On Agamben’s reading, the incompleteness of the bipolar machine of rite and play allows for the emergence of history. If there were pure rite, there would be no sense of history as a progression, but merely an eternal present in which every moment is subsumed by the always-already. Pure play would equally destroy all sense of time’s passing because each new moment would be completely unrelated to any prior moment in a complete domination of the never-before. Only with a differential margin between diachrony and synchrony which forestalls the other’s totalization does it become possible to grasp the passage of time.

The diachronic residue at the heart of the tonal system, on account of which the tonic cannot return to itself without passing through difference at the local level, corresponds structurally to the division that listening produces between the time of musical experience and the time of analytical representation. Their noncoincidence results from the time it takes to listen. Similarly, for Agamben, the residue testifies to the fact that humankind is at least minimally out-of-joint from the temporal succession in which its existence unfolds and thus (like resonance) always-already outside itself. Throughout his writings, Agamben develops a logic of relationality at odds with the deconstructive logic of iteration that would apportion between never-before and always-already to leave a representation of time that is part-diachrony, part-synchrony. Rather, Agamben proposes that what appears to be a diachronic or synchronic residue is not in fact a remnant of the other as if one could not be divided cleanly into the other,

but rather a common obstacle on account of which neither side is selfsame. It is a remnant that stains both diachrony and synchrony preventing their self-identity. If diachrony represents the destruction of relation in a complete never-before and synchrony its annihilation through a totalizing always-already, this remnant consists in the pure capacity to relate one “now” to another. This remnant, like the ear, is the supplementary capacity to make a connection between one moment in time and another: the ear steps outside temporal succession, goes back and forth, to anticipate a cadence and at the same time group together the phrase that it brings to an end. The diatonic sequence, then, is a musical mechanism which mobilizes the interplay of diachrony and synchrony so as to expose the trace of the time it takes to listen.

As in the situation of the banned cadence, this trace of the ear tends to remain transparent, becomes discernible only with the suspension of its usual operation. The passage at mm. 124–30 of the *Arietta* works in several ways towards deactivating the usual operation of the diatonic sequential progression upon which it is based, not least that the fifths progression itself recedes from the musical surface. The root motion, which for Rosen and Berger harbors the potential for tonal motion and teleology, takes second place to the linear and motivic dimensions of this sequence. From m. 124, the bass moves not in fifths, but in interlocking thirds, produced by a series of alternating  $\frac{6}{5}$  and  $\frac{5}{3}$  chords (Example 3). The sequence spins through two complete diatonic cycles (from the E $\flat$  root in m. 124 through the E $\flat$  now in the bass at m. 127<sup>1</sup> to another  $\frac{6}{5}$  chord in m. 129<sup>2</sup>) plus four further steps, but the sense of tonal frame is undermined somewhat by the inconsistent metrical placement and alignment in relation to the melodic patterning. The parallelism between the two complete cycles is also disrupted by the

slight discrepancy in the placement of the diminished fifth (between A $\flat$  and D the first and third time, but between E $\flat$  and A the second).

The fifths that are readily audible in this passage are in the upper voice where from m. 124<sup>3</sup> the melody liquidates the two-measure thematic snippet repeated in mm. 120–125<sup>1</sup> down into its tail, the descending-fifth motif that opens the movement. An overlap downplays the rhetorical prominence of the onset of the first cycle: the interlocking thirds begin with the G in the bass in m. 124<sup>1</sup>, but the regular harmonic rhythm does not kick in until the next measure, while the descending-fifth motif that is subject to sequential repetition coincides in mm. 124–25<sup>1</sup> with the tail of the final repetition of the longer melodic snippet. If anything seems to drive this passage it is the linear descent towards C buried in the inner voice which anchors the melodic sequence. This, however, extends backwards to m. 120, albeit without the chromatic filling in, inviting one to hear a compressed version of descending-fifths progression that supports the same set of voice-leading motions as in mm. 127–9 (the melodic fragment here split between overlapping outer voices).

The effect of this extended spiraling around the circle of fifths without a clear articulation of the diatonic frame is to remove any sense of goal. Unlike a single diatonic cycle which encloses the sequence within a higher-order prolongation, the repetition, coupled with the blurred boundaries, erodes the listener's sense of tonal teleology. Without origin and without end, the cycle becomes a medium through which tonality seems to turn back upon itself. The root motion through a fifth is thereby deprived of its functional significance: the linear momentum latent within it is thwarted and the expectation of goal-directed motion evaporates. Deprived of its functional force, the progression thus has the character of the banned cadence, its force held in a state of

suspension. By suspending its relation to origin and end, this sequence foregrounds the pure condition of possibility of its movement: that is, it points to the pure inclination of the ear that supplies the momentum of harmonic progression. Its temporality dissolves the opposition between synchrony (stasis) and diachrony (movement) in the direction of the remnant that prevents their coinciding with one another and with themselves. This remnant is simply the (im)potentiality for movement, understood as a simultaneous capacity to move and not to move.

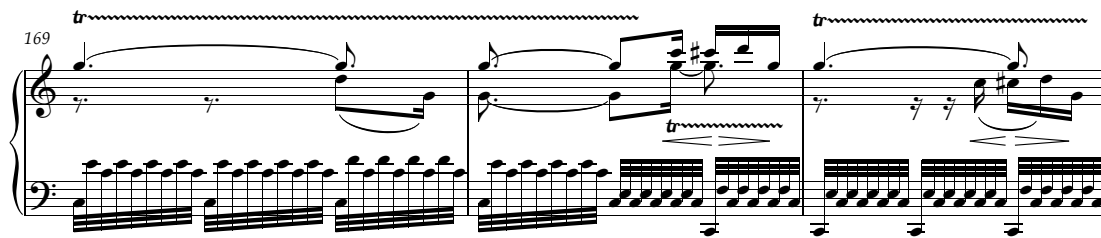
This capacity for harmonic relation lies less in the structure of the chords than in the exercise of the ear. Agamben's example of the time it takes to bring the representation of time to its end, while not musical as such, approaches issues of listening's temporality and closure. Agamben's analysis of poetry, specifically how certain forms recapitulate their rhyming schemes in their final stanza or *tornada*, is beyond the scope of this study,<sup>20</sup> but two insights pertinent to the analysis of musical listening may be distilled from it. First, rhyme gives rise to a temporality grounded in sound which is separate from the linear unfolding of the poem's meaning and instead involves going back and forth to recall and anticipate, especially where rhyming schemes evolve over successive stanzas. Second, the *tornada* brings the poem to an end by collapsing the opposition between sound and sense: by recapitulating all the rhymes and distilling all their recollections and anticipations into a single unit of meaning.

To see how the passage beginning with the outbreak of trills might constitute a "recapitulation" of this kind, let us first consider the other moment in the movement where the texture is saturated by trills. Of the trill on G in the closing measures (Example 4) Spitzer observes: "A little detail of harmony has escaped all the

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<sup>20</sup> Agamben 2005, 78–87 and 1999, 109–15.

commentators: it is that the chords, at mm. 169–71, accompanying the D–G–C and C–C#–D–G–G motives should be dominant, not tonic, as at mm. 2 and 8 of the theme” (2006, 157) (cf. Example 5). Construing Adorno’s aesthetic appearance as a dialectical flicker, Spitzer analyzes the trill as “an analogue for the ‘cognitive trill’ of *Schein*” (159). This flicker manifests itself in a “bifocal” tonality, the C-major chords in the left hand subtly dissonant with respect to the implied dominant present only in the trill. Spitzer argues that the refusal of the pedal C in the bass to shift up to D (or, to avoid parallel octaves, down to B) has its origins in the very opening of the theme. The point in contention is whether the melodic G’s in mm. 1 and 2 are harmonized by tonic or



Ex. 4: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 169–71.

Arietta  
Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

Ex. 5: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 1–16.

dominant harmony. If the decision is more readily resolved in favor of V in m. 2, m. 1 is more delicately poised between two alternatives. The interpretative flicker here lies between hearing either (1) the C in the bass on the downbeat of m. 1 as an accented neighbor to the harmony note D supporting V or (2) the D as an incomplete or double-neighbor figure relative to the primary C in which case the tonic is prolonged over the barline. The chromatic passing note inserted on the downbeat in variation 1 seems to retrospectively justify a dominant reading, as does the  $I_4^6$  chord in the following variation. The indecision at the theme's opening and the finale's tonic pedal go some way to supporting Spitzer's intuition that the trills do not merely resist the onslaught of linear time but also "escape the pull of tonal gravity" (157) which determines the dominant-tonic relation as one of opposition and not of substitutability.

The flicker of interpretative decision between tonic and dominant resembles a trill *in nuce* and its significance both follows from and exceeds this harmonic indistinction. The insertion of the chromatic passing note C# in the first variation is significant for pointing not only to the tonic-dominant relation but, moreover, to listening and its temporal disjointedness. This insertion is important less because it resolves goes hand in hand with its indistinction between tonic and dominant. Again, the suspension of the ordinarily transparent workings of the tonal system gives them a heightened perceptibility. The ear that motivates the movement from dominant to tonic is what goes unheard. In suspending or problematizing the way in which this relation of dominant to tonic typically expresses itself in tonic music, the indifference on the downbeat of m. 1 between tonic and dominant brings to the fore the possibility of a syntactical relationship experienced in its impotentiality. In conjuring up this relation as a potential unrealized in the passage, listening shows itself not simply as the condition of



possibility of the dominant-tonic relation, but as capable of a minimal separation from musical experience. This ecstatic listening cleaves itself from sound through a temporal distinction, which the C# registers within the music itself. The C# does not suggest that the ear is an arbiter of the ambiguity. Rather, the linear construction to which the C# draws attention participates in a looping-back by which the time it takes to listen is inscribed within the flow of musical experience.

The chromatic filling-out in variation 1 (Example 6) draws attention to the rising bass line which underpins the first half of the theme; the chromatic ascent remains a readily perceptible part of subsequent variations and assumes a greater audible significance when it is transferred to the melody during the outbreak of trills at mm. 108–18. To this extent, the variations perform a kind of analysis of the theme: it is not so much that they present a voice-leading reduction of the theme, but they seem to rehearse the perception of the rising line, not by paring it down to its essentials, but by making it more readily graspable in fleshing it out. They fulfill a potential in the theme, thereby enabling a more immediate recognition of its construction.



Ex. 6: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 16–24a (variation 1).

The idea that variations at once reprise and reflect analytically on both the theme and one another is suggested by many common-practice examples, but this movement goes further because it does not simply suggest a meta-relation between variation and theme (or one variation and an earlier one), but inscribes the minimal gap of listening within the workings of the theme itself. The first variation's chromatic line makes this disjunction more audible. The chromatic ascent in the bass encircles the entire first half of the theme, rising up through an octave from c to return to c' upon the repeat. With the single exception of variation 3 (Example 7) where the octave ascent picked out in the upper reaches of the left hand aligns perfectly with the formal division, the chromatic ascent in each of the other variations involves a degree of redundancy or superfluity. While the portion of the ascent between e and g tends to be expanded through fairly unremarkable neighbor notes and consonant skips, what is more striking is the wholesale repetition of a segment of the line that creates a looping-back effect across the end of the first half and the beginning upon its repeat.

In variation 1, where the inner dominant pedal from the tenor voice of the theme is expressed through a form of compound melody, the initial step up from c to d is decorated with the chromatic passing note (c#), but then the bass dips down to A# to decorate chromatically the rise from B through c and d to e across mm. 17–19; the c# is skipped, as if now superfluous given its prominence at the variation's opening. If this repetition is avoided, however, a more extensive one is not. The e from m. 19 is regained two measures later in the upper of the two voices, from whence it rises up through each chromatic step (the g and a<sup>b</sup> reversed) to the c in the first-time bar. Parallel to this ascent, the lower line hints at the beginnings of an ascent in the lower register which would connect up with the A# in m. 17. The second variation, in which the dominant pedal is

55a

*sf sf sf sf sf sf*

1.

L'istesso tempo

48b

*f*

*sempre f*

51b

53b

*sf sf sf sf sf sf sf sf sf sf sf sf*

55b

1.

Ex. 7: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 55a–54b (variation 3).

given greater emphasis, makes this connection more explicit: there is no hint of the motion from C to D from m. 1 of the theme in m. 33 which is instead supplanted by a g-pedal. Looking at what happens with the repeat of the first half of variation 2, it is

significant that the dominant pedal arrives in the measure before the first-time bar where it is preceded by an F–F# motion that can be traced back to a low E. As in variation 1, the rising line from the second measure of the theme is embellished, this time moving through A–B–c–c#–d–d#–e. The line continues through a registral transfer down an octave to produce a loop that encircles the entire first half, cutting across the division of the form. The juxtaposition of this G-centered loop alongside the more regularized ascent anchored on C in the next variation might even be heard as a large-scale expression of the tonic-dominant tension at the movement's outset.

The harmonic ambiguity from the very opening of the theme, expressed through the C–D motion, is not entirely suppressed within variation 2: the stepwise ascent from E to G continues in an inner voice with the motion A–Bb–B–c just before the repeat. The effect is to encase the segment G–c within the larger-scale ascent as a loop that takes place within the time of the G. A similar interior “recapitulation” takes place in the first variation where the chromatically filled-in ascent from A#/bb to D/d takes place twice, once in each register. The way in which the music loops back on itself and thereby contains within itself a mini-reprise of its ending segment suggests the operation of the ear, going over and anticipating portions as it forms an analytical representation of the theme's construction over a rising bass line. This task of the ear requires its own operational time, distinct from the moment-to-moment flow of the successive sounds and from the image of time put forward in the analytical representation of the passage. The repetition of the melodic falling fifth, together with the aural equivalence of the A# and bb, suggests a synchronic relation between 23a<sup>3</sup>–24a<sup>1</sup> and 17<sup>3</sup>–19<sup>1</sup>, allowing the two to be collapsed upon another. The effect is to set aside the music in between, which

contains the ascent in the upper register in the inner voice, as if it were a quasi-parenthetical supplement. It is as if the ear had temporarily stepped back from the linear flow driven by the chromatic rising line to at once replay (from the first time through) and anticipate (for it has not yet happened upon the repeat) the fragment of the ascent. Crucially, this segment contains the pitches that *complete* the octave ascent to return to the tonic. If the analytical representation of the first half of the theme contains the idea of a linear ascent from  $c$  to  $c'$ , the “recapitulated” segment is the musical material that *brings this representation to its end*.

Turning back to the theme, it is now easier to notice the way in which this process cuts across the division of the form: the E in m. 5 rises up to B in m. 7<sup>1</sup>. The left hand is in octaves at m. 5, but the lower octave drops out in m. 7<sup>2</sup>, leaving the lower octave to break off its ascent before the reprise. Imagining that this lower line continues silently, the G<sup>1</sup> in m. 7<sup>1</sup> would connect up to the C at the upbeat to the theme. The bass, though, falls again to the B<sup>1</sup> before it continues its ascent to E in m. 3<sup>1</sup>, recapturing the silent B<sup>1</sup> from m. 7<sup>1</sup>. As in variation 1, m. 1b<sup>3</sup> can be substituted for m. 7a<sup>3</sup> such that the time between m. 7a<sup>2</sup> and m. 1b<sup>3</sup> becomes superfluous and the first half of the theme could circle round on itself potentially over and over again without cadential punctuation. This creates an additional time which coexists with the time of the theme (Figure 1). The inseparable harmonic disjunction between tonic and dominant that invokes the activity of the ear also summons its operational time, the time it takes to listen.

But is it accurate to think of it as a *supplementary* time which inserts itself into a pre-existing linear flow so as to extend in? This would be to suggest that this music contains within itself another time that is somehow opposed to and distorts the ordinary flow of the theme. It would be another time outside historical time. Agamben argues that



Fig. 1: The time it takes to listen.

Guillaume's operational time is a better model because it shows this time to be a contraction of chronological time as its representation comes to an end, rather than a time that lies outside. The material that makes up this surplus music is not other than that which surrounds it (it is composed of a segment of the chromatic linear ascent) and yet it does not coincide exactly with the simplified unidirectional linear trajectory. This surplus time is minimally out-of-joint with the flow of musical time, yet not additional to or separable from it. This is not a case of the phrase expansion or extension that is commonplace in the Classical style: the surplus takes place within the regular eight-measure phrase without any obvious contraction of the musical syntax elsewhere to compensate. The opening four measures consist in a perfectly regular 1+1+2 construction culminating in a half cadence midway through the phrase. Note too how the  $c^3-c\sharp^3-d^3-g^2$  melodic figure amid the movement's final blaze of trills contracts the entire C–D motion from the theme's opening four-beat gesture into a single upbeat, signaling the malleability of the temporal image in the process of its production. The surplus time thereby exists alongside the time taken between mm. 7a<sup>2</sup> and 1b<sup>3</sup>. It is

simply the operational time or the time it takes to listen that exists alongside, minimally disjointed from, every experience of music's unfolding as a succession of sounds.

These processes of contraction and recapitulation are heightened in the presence of the trills in this movement—in the presence of a figure whose referential significance was explored earlier. Amid the movement's final blaze of trills, where tonic harmony supplants the expected dominant, the  $c^3-c^\sharp-d^3-g^2$  melodic figure contracts the entire C–D motion from the theme's opening four-beat gesture into a single upbeat, collapsing bass and melody into one another and signaling the malleability of the temporal image in the process of its production. Again, the indifference between tonic and dominant occurs alongside an instance of temporal contraction and reprise. It is, however, at the moment when the trills from m. 106 disrupt the rhythmic pulsation of the variation set with their glorious radiance (Example 8) that the wealth of recollection is most overwhelming. The rising line up a major sixth from G to E which cuts across the repeat and is highlighted particular in variation 2, finds its melodic counterpart in the theme's third measure. The ascent up a minor sixth from melodic  $g^2$  in m. 107 to the  $e^b^3$  in m. 118 simultaneously reprises both these motions from the theme, using the contraction of the melodic interval to motivate the only significant move away from C major in the entire movement. Bookending this span is a threefold statement of the falling fifth from F to  $B^b$  which recalls the falling fifth from  $d^2$  to  $g^1$  in mm. 1 and 7 of the theme. Each occurrence shifts up an octave: a pair of descending fifths in the bass herald the beginning of the ascent, while a final statement in the melody marks the arrival at the authentic cadential progression in  $E^b$  major.



Ex. 8: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, ii, mm. 106–121.

Both the melodic ascent and the threefold presentation of the falling fifth conspire to suggest that mm. 110–120<sup>2</sup> simultaneously form an expanded version of a number of moments in the theme: (1) the surplus time in mm. 7a<sup>3</sup>–1b<sup>2</sup> which generates the looping back of the rising bass line upon itself; (2) the bass line's ascent from G<sup>1</sup> to E in mm. 7a<sup>1</sup>–3b<sup>1</sup> which itself fills out (3) the melodic leap of a rising sixth in m. 3<sup>1-2</sup>. Further, the passage begins with a falling fourth C–G in the bass which recalls the first beat of the theme such that the trills are enclosed by the two intervals which frame the first four beats of the theme time, as if to suggest that the trills are a luxurious expansion and unraveling of the theme's own internal reprise. The trill again becomes a means of music's registering the supplementary listening activity by which music shows itself to be outside itself.

The back-and-forth motion of the ear as it constructs a representation of the time of musical experience describes an ethical dimension to late Beethoven that reconfigures the traditional Adornian paradigm. As the *Arietta's* flicker accelerates over the course of



the variations into a brilliant blaze of light, Adorno panics that we should avert our eyes. The aesthetic's promise must remain exactly that, lest, in fulfilling that promise, art might abandon its essential critical function of exposing society's present state of alienation. Paraphrasing Benjamin, Adorno tells us that the ethics of late Beethoven is like that of glimpsing a shooting star whose radiance peaks at the moment of its fall (1998, 184 cf. 1973, 408). This is why Adorno's negative dialectic has often been assimilated to a proto-deconstructionist position. Against this background, Agamben's thought makes for a fascinating new companion for late Beethoven because the diversity of themes in this work—from language to messianism, and sovereignty to animality—are unified by a single project: a challenge to Derridean deconstruction, waged on its most prominent territories.

Agamben discerns in deconstruction the same “thwarted messianism” (2005, 103) that operates in Adorno. His thought dwells in intimate proximity to, yet with a decisive difference from, deconstruction. He retains from Derrida the idea of time being out of joint with itself, but, instead of consigning the messianic event to an ever-deferred future, Agamben argues that messianic time is time's disjointedness from itself, the gap through it becomes possible to construct and bring to its end a representation of time. Where Adorno and Derrida see starry radiance as marking a no-longer or a not-yet, Agamben sees the flickering halo of time as it separates from itself at its edge.

The stakes are not limited to questions of theology or temporality, for, as Agamben's work shows, messianic temporality is just one way in which relationality more generally may be thought. The relation between now and hereafter corresponds to the way in which the relation between listening and music is conceived. Rather than on their noncoincidence, Agamben focuses on the possibility of relation that inheres on

both sides and on account of which neither side can coincide with itself.<sup>21</sup> Listening exceeds itself because it consists in the possibility of relating to its object and therefore never coincides with the analytical representations it produces. The *Arietta* variations demonstrate that music is irreducible to analytical representation not because there is something in it that exceeds every interpretation, but because it is always-already opening itself up to listening. This excess is nothing other than the inscription, within music's unfolding, of the time it takes to listen.

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<sup>21</sup> This may be contrasted with Adorno's well-known insistence on the irreducibility of the object to the concept and with Derrida's on upholding the absolute otherness of the other.

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## **Abstract**

This article argues that Beethoven's *Arietta* variations inscribe the activity of listening in their own melodic and harmonic processes. The argument proceeds from two observations: (1) that tonality anticipates the listening subject in the form of a “desire” to progress from dominant to tonic; (2) that the temporal representation produced by analysis is always minimally dislocated from the time of music's sonic unfolding. A notion of “the time it takes to listen” describes the time it takes for the ear to bring to its completion the analytical representation of time and thereby accounts for this gap. An analysis focusing on the role of the trill demonstrates how the *Arietta* variations reflect this supplementary temporality in their own unfolding.